

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
INTERVIEW WITH AFN EUROPE
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AFN

Q. It's your second day?

A. This is my second day as Secretary of Defense.

Q. How do you like it so far?

A. It's gone fine so far. I hope it continues this well into the future. It's probably unusual that on the second day as the Secretary that I would set off on a foreign trip. But I had this trip to Munich planned for several months and when I reviewed it with the President, he decided it was important enough to come and establish our special relationship with the German government and to reaffirm our interest in NATO.

Q. What kind of feedback are you getting? Is this proving to be useful -- encounters at the conference?

A. It's a very useful encounter. NATO is truly at a fork in the roads now. It was created, as you know, well over 40 years ago for the purpose of providing a defensive alliance against the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union. Now that those are dissolved, for the last several years, there has been a substantial debate as to not only what NATO should do but whether it had any relevance at all. During that period, the American role in NATO was (inaudible) and certain people thought the United States was losing its interest in Europe. We were withdrawing forces from Germany all this time, from over 300,000 on the way down to about 100,000.

Just last month President Clinton came to the NATO summit meeting and proposed the Partnership for Peace which provides an architecture around which NATO is going to be built in the decades to come. It is the future of NATO. This is not only giving NATO new relevance, new significance, but it has established the United States again as NATO's leader. It's very important, from my point of view and the President's point of view, once his plan was unanimously adopted by the NATO members, to start building on that plan, to start moving off in the new direction. This is the first move in that direction.

Q. One of the reasons for the success of U.S. forces in NATO and in Europe has been there high degree of training and the excellent equipment they've had. You will be shepherding a new budget through Congress. Are we on the threshold of perhaps dropping off from that level?

A. No. We have a budget today which is about the size of our budget in the late 70's. That period of time we were supposed to have a hollow force. Now we have about that same budget level, but there are some very, very important differences. First of all, our force is reduced to the size of about a third from what it was. Secondly, the amount of money we are spending on operation and maintenance account -- that's what primarily determines readiness -- is about 25% more. So here we have a force that is a third less, yet we're spending a fourth more on its readiness. There's a very substantial difference in the emphasis on readiness. We are continuing to supply the funds needed to maintain the force. Our force will be smaller, particularly our force in Germany will be smaller. But it will be maintained at a high rate of readiness.

Q. What kind of technologies do we need in the future? What are you looking for to keep money there for? We don't perhaps need Star Wars technology, SDI anymore, but where should we be spending money?

A. There are several different areas, but it's too long a discussion to get into a lot of detail. Let me just highlight a few. One special interest of both the Army and the Air Force is the next generation of precision, guided munitions. We already have very effective precision guided munitions. Of course, those were demonstrated quite effectively during the Desert Storm operation. They also have some limitations. A big limitation being that the operator has to be engaged with the weapon all the way to the target. We are developing a next generation of autonomous, precision guided munitions, so-called, "Fire and Forget" systems, which provide a much greater degree of safety for the people who are operating the systems, a lower degree of vulnerability. We're also making them all-weather, which is an important feature.

We're also developing a next generation fighter aircraft, the F-22, which will be the most advanced, the most effective fighter in the world when it comes into our force. Some people have argued that we don't need to take this next step in the development, that the F-15 is already the best fighter in the world, and that we don't have to compete with the Russians anymore who had the second most advanced fighters. We are concerned that the aviation technology of the Russians, or even the planes, are going to be sold to third world countries all over the world and we may face these in combat sometime. We're not satisfied with simply being a little better than the aircraft engaged. In Desert Storm, we learned that air superiority is good, but that air supremacy is better in terms of saving lives and winning wars quickly. So we are going to this next generation of fighters. Those are just a few examples.

Q. Final question, sir. You've been in office as Secretary for a very short time, but have you had a chance to think about what you'd like to accomplish during your tenure?

A. Yes, I have. First of all, highest on the list, the attention, the care, concern for our military forces. We can talk about budgets. We can talk about readiness. We can talk about modernization of the forces. But, first on the list is maintaining a high quality, high morale, very effective military fighting force. We have to put the people in our forces first.

I'm completely and totally dedicated to doing that. You have military forces here in Germany that are really on the front lines today. They're not just in garrisons here. You have very many of them that are engaged in one of the most impressive airlift/airdrop operations ever done in the history of the world. This is an operation that compares with the Berlin Airdrop of a much earlier generation. We have forces involved in Macedonia -- small forces, to be sure, there in a peacekeeping operation. If the Bosnians succeed in having a peace agreement, then we may be sending a substantial number of troops, perhaps as many as a division of troops, in peacekeeping operations in Bosnia. The troops here in Germany are on the front lines.

I have been very impressed in my discussions with the chief of staff of the German army, the minister of defense, and the chancellor on the reaction they have, the warmth they feel for the American troops who are here. It tells me that we not only have American soldiers here who are fine fighting men. We have American soldiers and sailors and airmen who are involved in humanitarian operations, but we also have some of the greatest ambassadors in the world. Here we have 100,000 military forces in another country, and they are warmly received, they are welcomed as friends. That's a very good (inaudible). So I would ask all of the American troops here in Germany to take seriously your role as ambassadors. You have done a marvelous job in that so far, and it's very important that you continue it.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary.